

TYJESKI TILE CO.

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

NEWSLETTER, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2019

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, November 12, 7pm
“Architectural Terra Cotta & Tile of Shorewood”
Shorewood Public Library
3920 North Murray Avenue
Shorewood, Wisconsin 53211

The Village of Shorewood has many decorative buildings from the 1920s and 30s. During that time, it was common to see gargoyles reading books above the doorway and carvings of tall ships in the floor. These colorful and eye-catching wonders very often were manufactured in clay.

In this presentation I will illustrate two specialized, craftsman trades, architectural terra cotta and art tile, and show how they made Shorewood an even more beautiful place.

This program was at the Shorewood Historical Society's annual meeting in May 2019. If you missed it, now is your chance to learn more about Shorewood and Milwaukee local history.

[Read more here.](#)

STUDIO SNAPSHOT



While the studio is in progress, I've been preparing designs for tiles that will be available in a catalog.

FEATURED BUILDING



McKinley Elementary in Wauwatosa is one of several grand schoolhouses designed by Herbst & Kuenzli. It will soon be demolished for a new building.

BLOG POSTS

Faience tiles decorate the hallways and classrooms at McKinley Elementary in Wauwatosa. Even though the school building will be demolished next year, the artistic tiles are intended to be reinstalled in the new structure. How much of them and where is uncertain.





TILE & TERRA COTTA NEWS: WAUWATOSA SCHOOL OF INCREDIBLE BEAUTY

The architects Herbst & Kuenzli designed some of the most fascinating school buildings in the Milwaukee area. Between 1924 and 1929, they designed several schools in their offices on the top floor of the Bartlett Building. Marquette University High School (1924), St. Catherine School (1928), Messmer High School (1929), and Wauwatosa High School (1929) were a few. Each of these school buildings had facades made of architectural terra cotta and brick. Faience tile was also found in all of the interiors. In terms of design, they were some of the most prestigious in the 1920s.

They also designed a pair of elementary schools for Wauwatosa Public Schools in 1929; Roosevelt Elementary on 73rd & Wright St and McKinley Elementary on 89th & Meinecke Ave. Not only are they twin schools, but they also share design motifs with Wauwatosa High School, now East High. Both buildings are stunning examples of academic architecture. Many schools built after World War II

did not plan for such beautiful facilities. Unfortunately, one of them is about to be demolished soon.

McKinley Elementary is one of four school replacements in Wauwatosa that is a part of the \$124.9 million redevelopment referendum. By Fall 2021, Underwood, McKinley, Lincoln, and Wilson will all be replaced with completely new buildings. While the upgrades will make the schools better learning environments, each of these historic buildings feature precious, handmade architectural details. Such craft may make learning in these schools seem like a privilege. McKinley is by far one of the neatest and most beautiful elementary schools in the state. Few schools can compare to the quantity of artistic features installed in the building. And, while Roosevelt Elementary is a twin school, McKinley has just a little

Top: McKinley Elementary, designed by Herbst & Kuenzli in 1929. First of their school buildings to be demolished. Architectural terra cotta from the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company.

bit more.

Despite the loss of historic design, it must be acknowledged that this development is exciting and crucial for the students, staff, and school communities. The new facilities will be more proactive toward the needs of their communities and learners. Much of the rationale for new buildings was covered by Darryl Enriquez in the [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#). While the new school buildings will be tremendous for Wauwatosa, hopefully they will not lose the unique historic features that made learning in these schools so incredible.

Gorgeous tiles, like the ones pictured below, are abundant at McKinley. In the article by Enriquez

he posted a photograph of a bubbler with faience tiles from the Mosaic Tile Company of Zanesville, Ohio. He cautioned that, "McKinley Elementary School and three other elementary school have interior and exterior architectural artifacts that would be retained or incorporated in new construction and renovations" as long as the referendum was approved. This was back in October 2018, which, it was voted by 61 percent in favor of the referendum. [Read more here.](#)

While this comment made by Enriquez provides a brief sigh of relief, what really will happen to all these tiles? Since last winter I have visited many Wauwatosa Public Schools to document their architectural tiles. While speaking with staff members at



Drinking fountain at McKinley. One of three bubbler designs with tiles from the Continental Faience & Tile Company.



Faience tiles found at one of many bubblers in McKinley Elementary. Tiles made at Mosaic Tile Co. in Zanesville.



Fireplace in the kindergarten room at McKinley. Tiles created by the Continental Faience and Tile Co. of South Milwaukee.

those schools, they expressed appreciation for them and hope to see them in their new school buildings.

McKinley Elementary, in particular, has tons of tiles. The Art teacher, Jenny Leigh, helped me around the building to discover their stunning collection. All the bathrooms and several stairways feature unglazed tiles. Numerous bubbler backgrounds appear on all three floors. Most extraordinary is a fireplace in the kindergarten room.

These tiles are of historic significance and they contribute to the culture of education. Some of the tile is simply functional, such as the floor tile in the bathrooms and the coping found on many windowsills. However, much of the tiles are works of art. They were designed to make schoolchildren feel welcome at school, to enjoy the learning environment, and to feel at home. They were meant to capture student's imaginations, nurture their creativity, and foster their appreciation for art. Nowadays, these tiles can still teach students craft, beauty, and how to imagine creative ways to use wall spaces.

Kindergarten teacher, Susan Zeimet, admits that she loves having the coolest room in the school building. She has been teaching in the room with the fireplace for 19 years. During this time she has learned many stories about the showpiece in her classroom. She understands there is history in her room and appreciates the importance of those tiles. She suggests that the fireplace should be installed in the library of the new school building.

Will this happen? As of now, many staff hope so. In the meantime, I will continue to investigate the story of what is happening to these tiles. Hopefully, these tiles remain with the kids. The kids should be able to see these tiles when they go to the drinking fountain for water, or sit in front of the fireplace for story time. Whether it is a new school building tomorrow or a hundred years from now, those tiles are for the kids and the school community.